

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for distributing digital works among a retail merchant, a remote server, and a customer at a customer node, each digital work having identification data associated therewith,

the remote server being intermittently coupled through a communications link which includes a public communications network to the customer node, the method comprising the steps of:

storing the digital works and their associated identification data on a memory of the remote server;

purchasing from the retail merchant a package associated with a desired one of the digital works, wherein the package includes the desired digital work's identification data;

sending a request to access the desired digital work from the customer node through the public communications network to the remote server, the request specifying the desired digital work's identification data included in the purchased package;

receiving at the remote server the request to access the desired digital work;

searching the digital works stored on the remote server for the desired digital work specified by the identification data in the received request;

transmitting the desired digital work from the remote server through the public communications network to the customer node;

receiving at the customer node the desired digital work;

storing the desired digital work on a memory of the customer node.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the identification data for each of the digital works stored on the remote server includes a unique identifier, and further wherein the unique identifier is displayed on an outer surface of the package.

5 3. The method of claim 2, wherein the remote server is intermittently coupled through the communications link which includes the public communications network to a merchant node used by the retail merchant, and further wherein the identification data for each of the digital works stored on the remote server further includes a status indicating whether the digital work is available or not available for access, the method further comprising the steps of:

10 receiving a request to set the status of the desired digital work as available for access at the remote server through the public communications network from the merchant node, the request specifying the desired digital work's unique identifier included in the purchased package;

15 searching the digital works stored on the remote server for the desired digital work specified by the unique identifier in the received request; and

setting at the remote server the status of the desired digital work as available for access.

20 4. The method of claim 1, wherein the identification data for each of the digital works stored on the remote server includes a unique combination of an identifier and a password, and further wherein the unique combination of the identifier and the password are disposed on an inner surface of the package and sealed within the package, the method further comprising the step of:

after purchasing from the retail merchant the package associated with the desired digital work, opening the package to reveal the desired digital work's unique combination of the

identifier and the password disposed on the inner surface of the package.

5        5.        The method of claim 1, wherein the identification data for each of the digital works stored on the remote server includes a unique identifier, and further wherein a first portion of the unique identifier is displayed on an outer surface of the package and a second portion of the unique identifier is stored on a magnetic strip on the package, the method further comprising the steps of:

10                after purchasing from the retail merchant the package associated with the desired digital work, reading the second portion of the unique identifier from the magnetic stripe on the package; and

              printing the second portion of the unique identifier for the customer.

15        6.        The method of claim 1, wherein the identification data for each of the digital works stored on the remote server includes a unique identifier, and further wherein a first portion of the unique identifier is displayed on an outer surface of the package and a second portion of the unique identifier is disposed on an inner surface of the package and sealed within the package, the method further comprising the step of:

20                after purchasing from the retail merchant the package associated with the desired digital work, opening the package to reveal the second portion of the unique identifier disposed on the inner surface of the package.

7.        The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

sending a request for customer registration data from the remote server through the public communications network to the customer node;

inputting at the customer node the requested customer registration data;

transmitting the inputted customer registration data from the customer node through the public communications network to the remote server;

receiving at the remote server the transmitted customer registration data; and

storing the transmitted customer registration data on the memory of the remote server.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the public communications network comprises the Internet.

9. A system for distributing digital works, each digital work having identification data associated therewith, the system comprising:

a. a package associated with a desired one of the digital works, wherein the package includes the desired digital work's identification data and is purchased from a retail merchant;

b. a communications link which includes a public communications network;

c. a customer node used by a customer, the customer node comprising:

i. memory;

ii. a processor connected to the memory of the customer node; and

iii. equipment connected to the processor of the customer node for coupling to the communications link which includes the public communications network; and

iv. logic for performing the steps of:

(1) sending a request to access the desired digital work through the public communications network, the request specifying the desired digital work's identification data included in the purchased package;

(2) receiving the desired digital work through the public communications network; and

(3) storing the desired digital work on the memory of the customer node; and

d. a remote server comprising:

i. memory;

ii. a processor connected to the memory of the remote server; and

iii. equipment connected to the processor of the remote server for coupling to the communications link which includes the public communications network;

iv. the digital works and identification data associated with each of the digital works stored on the memory of the remote server; and

v. logic for performing the steps of:

(1) receiving the request to access the desired digital work through the public communications network from the customer node;

(2) searching the digital works stored on the remote server for the desired digital work specified by the identification data in the received request; and

(3) transmitting the desired digital work through the public communications network to the customer node.

10. The system of claim 9, wherein the identification data for each of the digital works stored on the remote server includes a unique identifier, and further wherein the unique identifier is displayed on an outer surface of the package.

5 11. The system of claim 9, wherein the remote server is intermittently coupled through the communications link which includes the public communications network to a merchant node used by the retail merchant, the identification data for each of the digital works stored on the remote server further includes a status indicating whether the digital work is available or not available for access, and the remote server further comprises logic for performing the steps of:

10 receiving a request to set the status of the desired digital work as available for access through the public communications network from the merchant node, the request specifying the desired digital work's unique identifier included in the purchased package;

15 searching the digital works stored on the remote server for the desired digital work specified by the unique identifier in the received request; and

setting the status of the desired digital work as available for access.

20 12. The system of claim 9, wherein the identification data for each of the digital works stored on the remote server includes a unique combination of an identifier and a password, and further wherein the unique combination of the identifier and the password are disposed on an inner surface of the package and sealed within the package.

13. The system of claim 9, wherein the identification data for each of the digital works stored on the remote server includes a unique identifier, and further wherein a first portion of the unique identifier is displayed on an outer surface of the package and a second portion of the unique identifier is stored on a magnetic strip on the package.

5

14. The system of claim 9, wherein the identification data for each of the digital works stored on the remote server includes a unique identifier, and further wherein a first portion of the unique identifier is displayed on an outer surface of the package and a second portion of the unique identifier is disposed on an inner surface of the package and sealed within the package.

15. The system of claim 9, wherein the public communications network comprises the Internet.

10